Amendment No. 8
Voluntary Universal Pre-K Education

Background

The amendment was sponsored by the Committee on Pre-K and was approved by the voters of Florida in November 2002. On January 14 and February 3, 2003, the Select Committee on Constitutional Amendment Implementation received testimony on this amendment.

The January 14 meeting began with Commissioner Jim Horne from the Florida Board of Education, followed by Alex Penelas, Mayor of Miami-Dade County. Mayor Penelas was instrumental in facilitating many discussions around the state concerning the issue. The discussions led to the completion of a document entitled, "Florida Universal Pre-K Conference: A Brand New Day" which was given to all the members at the meeting.

Tim Elwell with OPPAGA then presented an update to the OPPAGA report "School Readiness Program's Potential Not Realized with Critical Issues Unresolved." Mr. Elwell also provided the committee with a PowerPoint presentation outlining the report findings, the issues, problems and possibilities of the current readiness system, and implications for the committee to consider.

Other speakers included: Katherine Kamiya, Executive Director for the Partnership for School Readiness, (provided an AWI flowchart), Phyllis Kalifeh, President of the Florida's Children Forum, (provided a PowerPoint presentation along with a position paper representative of early childhood stakeholders), and Butch Cronon, President and CEO of Hand 'n Hand Academy, representing private providers (provided a handout, "The Integral Importance of Private Sector Involvement in the Pre-Kindergarten/Early Education Structure.")

Due to time constraints, three remaining speakers were delayed speaking on the issue until the February 3, 2003 meeting. Joy Frank, a Legislative Consultant for the Florida Association of District School Superintendents began the meeting with presentation of the report "White Paper on Voluntary Universal Pre-kindergarten Constitutional Amendment." Ted Granger with the United Way of Florida also spoke and finally, Sarah Sprinkel, Director of Legislative Affairs with the Orange County Public Schools completed the list of speakers.

Two interested parties who submitted information for the committee's consideration but were unable to appear were Dr. Patrick Heffernan with Floridian's for School Choice and Larry Keough with the Florida Catholic Conference.

Copies of these presentations and handouts may be obtained from the Committee's web site at: www.flsenate.gov/sci

Questions and Issues

Governance

Who will establish policies governing the existing school readiness program and new voluntary universal Pre-K program? What will be the lead agency in implementing the program? To what extent should the program administration be integrated into existing organizational structures? To what extent should program responsibility be distributed among multiple organizations? Is the current structure designed to handle the enhanced Pre-K program?

Time factor

What needs to be addressed this year? What type of groundwork needs to be prepared this year? What should be given further study and consideration? What should be the schedule for completing any study?

Program Design and Standards

In general, what should be included in the broad program design? Who should set specific program and curriculum standards? What is the role of the Department of Education? What type of accountability measures should be developed?

Delivery Systems

How will private providers and local school districts be affected by new program standards or regulatory processes?

Funding

What will be the costs associated with the new program? How will funds be allocated? How will funds flow from the state to individual providers? What is the current baseline for funding existing programs?

Guiding Principles

- Given the time available before full implementation is required, the process should be methodical and questions should be thoroughly researched.

- Research and studies should, however, be conducted according to a set schedule with concrete deliverables. Studies should be used to improve, not delay, implementation. Decisions need to be made early enough in the process for proper planning to occur. The Pre-K curriculum should not be day care.

- The Department of Education should have the lead role in the development of program and curriculum standards.

- Program implementation should be sensitive to the need for a seamless continuum of care and education for children in the 0-4 age range. The existing connection between child care and Pre-K should not be disrupted in order to implement an improved Pre-K system.

- Private providers constitute a significant portion of existing Pre-K service providers. Voluntary universal Pre-K can not be implemented without private providers.

Proposed Recommendations

<u>Governance</u>

Utilize the current system as the base from which to work, but determine where improvements might be made, especially at the local level.

A new bureaucracy should not be created until the existing system is given the opportunity to determine its effectiveness.

Whereas the current education system is based on a seamless K-20 approach, there is an existing system for children ages 0-4. This system, which is still relatively new, has experience in providing coordination between day care and Pre-K services. This coordination will continue to be needed when universal Pre-K is implemented.

The current system also has the advantage of flexibility through local control. This flexibility will be valuable as the new Pre-K program is implemented.

The committee received testimony on some of the challenges faced by the Partnership for School Readiness and local coalitions. These groups should be reviewed, however, and their roles modified if necessary.

<u>Current System</u>

- o Agency for Workforce Innovation – Houses administration of School Readiness.
- o Partnership for School Readiness – Responsible for state level policy
- o Local Coalitions – Responsible for local policy.

OPPAGA should conduct a follow-up study on school readiness.

The original OPPAGA evaluation was conducted while the current system was beginning to be implemented. A follow-up study based on new data and a system that has more implementation experience would be valuable.

Time Factor

In order to provide an organized implementation of voluntary universal Pre-K, a schedule for study and implementation should be established.

Because the program must be fully implemented by the beginning of the 2005 school year, there should be a methodical approach to study and legislative action.

A proposed schedule is:

- o Prior to FY 2003-2004 – Enact legislation designating the basic existing governance framework and requiring that a study be conducted on any modifications needed to improve the capacity of the current system or to make this system more successful.
- o Prior to FY 2004-2005 – Study completed; curriculum finalized by the Legislature; any modifications to the governance resolved by the Legislature; if funding is available, phase-in of Pre-K program by targeting needs-based candidates first.
- o Prior to FY 2005-2006 – Full implementation required; mandatory review should be scheduled to determine effectiveness in time for 2006 session.

Program Design and Standards

The Department of Education should recommend to the Legislature in time for the 2004 regular session options and recommendations for the program curriculum. The Department's report should take into consideration that there are a variety of successful curricula for Pre-K and that curriculum flexibility should be part of the program. The Department of Education should have a continuing role in the development of the program and curriculum.

While there are compelling reasons for continuing to house the program under the current governance structure, the Department of Education, as the state's lead agency on education in general, should play the key role in working to develop the program curriculum. The department should receive input from current Pre-K providers as it develops its proposals.

The department should advise the Legislature specifically as to the age appropriate number of hours each day and days per year that should be devoted to actual Pre-K education as opposed to day care options. This information will be important in helping to determine proper funding levels for the Pre-K program.

Accountability

There must be a minimum threshold of certification standards for participation in the Pre-K program.

Given the pressures that will be placed on the current system of Pre-K providers due to the influx of new students and the potential for new providers to open their doors, there needs to be a minimum set of standards to protect the health and safety of the students.

Age appropriate outcome testing should be required and uniformly applied. The outcome measures should, at a minimum, indicate whether a 4-year old is ready to enter kindergarten. The current "School Readiness Uniform Screening" instrument could be used for this purpose. The results should be used to review the quality of the facilities.

A system of regular audits should be conducted to ensure that the most efficient measures are used and that fraud is identified.

Delivery Systems

The new Pre-K program should have the participation of local school districts and private providers.

Having both school districts and private providers involved in the program ensures that parents will have a choice of options. Current providers should continue to have opportunities to participate in the Pre-K system.

The capacity requirements of full implementation demand that private providers continue to have a major role.

Funding

Funding should flow from the state partnership to the local coalitions for distribution in the most efficient manner, although current funding methodologies should be reexamined at the state level to ensure equity.

This item builds on the arguments presented in the governance recommendation and proposes that, despite the need for review and study, the current structure should be the basis for implementing universal Pre-K.